



Nature, Path and Types of Liberation in Jaina Philosophy

Dr. Nitu Mani Roy

Independent Researcher, Silchar, Assam, India

Received: 28.05.2025; Accepted: 31.05.2025; Available online: 31.05.2025

©2025 The Author(s). Published by Scholar Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract

Dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa are accepted as the four goals of individual by all Indian philosophical systems. These four aims are called Puruṣārtha. Of these four, mokṣa (liberation) is the ultimate goal of human being. Mokṣa is a sanskrit word. Here mokṣa signifies liberation or emancipation. In Indian philosophy other terms also used for liberation. In Indian philosophical systems the terms vimukti, nihśreyasa, kaivalya, vimokṣa, apavarga, mukti, and nirvāna are used for liberation. In Jaina philosophy liberation is termed as 'mokṣa' and 'vimokṣa'. According to Jain philosophy the cause of bondage is action. And the complete annihilation of all action is liberation.

Keywords: Jainism, Āsrava, Bandha, Samvara, Nirjarā, Meditation, Liberation

Introduction:

Liberation is the most important topic of Indian philosophical systems. The main aim of Indian philosophical systems is to attain liberation. The word 'liberation' means release, free, deliverance or freedom. Thus liberation is release from the circle of birth, death and rebirth, release from all kinds of suffering and also release from all kinds of action. According to Jain philosophy liberation is release from all eight kinds of action. The term Jaina is derived from the word 'Jina'. The literal meaning of the word 'Jina' is conqueror. In this paper we will discuss about the nature, path and types of liberation in Jaina philosophy.

Nature of bondage and liberation in Jaina philosophy:

The ultimate aim of Jaina philosophy is liberation. Jainism holds liberation as the highest end of a man. According to Jain philosophy the absolute destruction of all karma is liberation. Jainism holds that the connection of the soul with the karma is bondage and separation of the soul from them is liberation. The karma unites the soul to the body. As long as the soul is connected with the Karma, the soul remains under bondage and migrates from one body to another. Therefore, Jainism holds that the absolute deliverance of the Soul from all karma is liberation.

Umāsvāmī states that perfect knowledge or omniscience is achieved when at first deluding actions have been destroyed and then knowledge-covering, perception-covering and obstructive actions are destroyed (Mohakṣayājjñānadarśanāvara āntarāyakṣayācca kevalam, Tattvārthasūtra, x.1, p.146). After the attainment of kevala jñāna or omniscience, the cause generating bondage being absent and nirjarā being present, the soul becomes free from the remaining four kind of non-destructive actions (aghātiya Karmas), viz. āyu,

nāma, gotra, and vedaniya actions and thus being free from all kinds of actions he accomplishes liberation. It is said in the *Tattvārthasutra* also that after attaining omniscience (kevala jñāna), the non-existence of the causes of bondage and the total annihilation of all actions through dissipation or nirjarā is liberation.¹

In Jainism the inflow of karma into the soul is called āsrava. This inflow of karma is produced from the action of the body, speech and mind. According to Umāsvāmī the action of the body, speech and mind is activity or yoga. And this activity is called influx or āsrava.² The actions or karmas enter into the soul through āsravas, just as the water enters into a boat through different holes. Nemichandra in his *Dravyasamgraha* divided āsrava into two kinds, bhāvāsrava and dravyāsrava. Bhāvāsrava is that modification of the soul through which karma enters into the soul. Dravyāsrava is that influx of matter which produces different kinds of action such as jñānāvaraniya and the rest. Jainism recognizes eight kinds of action. These are jñānāvaraniya, darśanāvaraniya, mohaniya, vedalia, nāma, āyu, gotra and antarāya. Dravyāsrava is the actual influx of matter into the soul through which these eight kinds of action are generated. Umāsvāmī mentioned (declared) these eight kinds of action as eight varieties of prakṛti-bandha. Thus, according to the eight kinds of action, dravyāsrava is mainly of eight types, namely jñānāvaraniya, darśanāvaraniya, vedanīya, mohaniya, nāma, āyu, gotra and antarāya.³ Umāsvāmī recognises the two kinds of āsrava, Śubha and the Aśubha āsrava. Śubha āsrava is that by which virtuous activities enter into the soul and aśubha āsrava is that by which evil or sinful activities enter into the soul.⁴ Thus the different types of āsravas are nothing but those ways through which a person comes to be attached to the objects of worldly life, which produce in him attachment and false knowledge. It leads him pleasurable or painful experiences. And then, he transmigrates continuously in the wheel of birth and death.

According to Madhvācārya āsrava is the cause of the bondage (Āsravo bhavahetu, Sarva darśana samgraha, 42). The karma sticks to the soul which leads the soul to bondage. According to Umāsvāmī false belief, non-abstinence, carelessness, passions and activities are the sources of bondage.⁵ That is to say bondage is caused by these five types of bhāvāsrava. When the soul is excited with passions, it takes up material particles which are fit for actions. This is called bondage. When there is influx of karma, there is bondage of the self. According to *Dravyasamgraha* that conscious state through which actions are bound with the self is known as bhāva-bandha. On the other hand, the interpenetration of the particles (pradeśas) of action and the self is known as dravya-bandha. Bhāva-bandha is the connection of the self with mental or thought activities that are generated when the soul is actuated by passions or desire and hatred to worldly objects. In *Vardhmāna Purāṇa* also it is found that the modification or change of consciousness comprising of desire and hatred by which actions are bound with the self is called bhāva-bandha.⁶ Bhāva-bandha relates exactly to bhāvāsrava. After this bhāva-bandha, there is connection of the soul with actual actions. This connection of the soul and actions is called dravya-bandha. It is said in the *Vardhmāna Purāṇa* also that the connection of the soul and actions which is caused by bhāva-bandha is called as dravya-bandha by the wisemen. And it is of four types.⁷ Umāsvāmī states that bondage is of four sorts, namely Prakṛti, Sthiti, Anubhāva and pradeśa (Prakṛti-sthiti-anubhva-pradeśāstadvidhayāḥ, *Tattvārthasūtra*, viii,3). The soul in its real nature is free and does not partake either in bodily pleasure or in pain. It is free from such modifications in its natural state. The soul is pure if it is not connected with the

Karma. But when the soul is connected with the Karma, it becomes subject to birth and death, pain and pleasure. The soul in its samsārī condition suffers different types of afflictions. As long as the soul is connected with Karma it keeps on rotating on the circle of birth and death and it remains under bondage.

When Karmas or actions are completely burnt up and nothing remains behind to transmigrate from one existence to another, the soul no more passes from one birth to another. Then the soul becomes eternally free from the cycle of transmigration and attains the absolute liberation. When the soul attains liberation, it goes up to the summit of the Lokākāsa or the universe which is called Siddha-sīla or Region of the Liberated (Tadanantaramūrdham gacchtyālokāntāt, Tattvārthasūtra, x.5).

Path to liberation in Jaina philosophy:

According to Jainism liberation is the absolute freedom from the bondage of action. To get rid of the bondage of action Jainism advocates two processes, viz., Samvara and Nirjarā. Jainism holds that liberation can be attained through these two processes. According to Umāsvāmī, samvara is that process which stops or obstructs the inflow of karma into the soul (Āsravanirodhaḥ samvaraḥ, Tattvārthasūtra, ix.1). Thus, samvara is the stoppage of the influx of karma into the soul. Madhvācārya also states-

“Āsravanirodhaḥ samvaraḥ, yenātmani praviśat karma pratiśidhyate sa
guptisamityādi samvaraḥ | |” (Sarva-darśana-saṃgraha, 40).

That means Samvara is the obstruction of the influx of Karma. That means Samvara is that state through which action entering into the soul is obstructed. Umāsvāmī in his Tattvārthasutra mentions six varieties of samvara as: “Sa gupti-samiti-dharmāanuprekṣā-parīṣahajayacārītraṇi | | Tattvārthasūtra, ix.2 | | Gupti is the restraining of right activities.⁸ The activities are the actions of the mind, body and speech. Thus, gupti is the restraining of the activities of the mind, body and speech. Madhvācārya defines gupti as the detachment of the soul from that activity (yoga) which is the cause of samsāra. According to him gupti is of three sorts, namely kāya-gupti, vāg-gupti and mano-gupti.⁹ Kāya-gupti is the restraining of the actions of the body. Vāg-gupti is the controlling of the actions of the organ of speech (tongue) mind and mano-gupti is the controlling of the mind from bad thinking. Samiti is of five types, viz. īryā, bhāṣā, eṣaṇā, ādānanikṣepa and utsarga.¹⁰ īryā-samiti is the non-injury to all creatures while walking. According to Yogasāstra of Hemachandrācārya, careful walking in the public path where the sun's rays shinning, as to avoid injury to all living beings, is called as īryā-samiti by the saints.¹¹ Bhāṣā-samiti is the gentle and beneficial speech. Eṣaṇā samiti is receiving alms.¹² Eṣaṇā-samiti is avoiding food which causes pain to all living beings. That means eṣaṇā-samiti is avoiding food which contain meat or creatures. Ādānanikṣepa-samiti is receiving and keeping things which are essential for religious purposes only, after examination. And utsarga-samiti is attending bodily evacuation such as, cough, urine, stool in that place which is free from all living beings.¹³ Umāsvāmī mentions ten kinds of virtues. According to him virtues consisting of supreme forbearance, modesty, straightforwardness, purity, truthfulness, self-restraint, austerity, renunciation, non-attachment and supreme celibacy.¹⁴ Reflection (anuprekṣā) consisting of meditation on transitoriness, helplessness, transmigration, loneliness, distinctness, impurity, influx, stoppage, dissociation, the world, rarity of enlightenment and meditation on the essential principles of the world.¹⁵ Parīṣahajaya consisting of the conquering of the all kinds of troubles like, hunger, thirst, cold, heat,

insect-bites, nakedness, absence of pleasures, women, pain arising from roaming, discomfort of postures, uncomfortable couch, scolding, injury, begging, losses, illness, pain inflicted by blades of grass, dirt, reverence and honour, learning, ignorance, and lack of faith.¹⁶ The equanimity, reinitiation, purity of non-injury, slight passion, and perfect conduct are the five kinds of cāritra or conduct.¹⁷

By the practice of these six varieties of samvara the influx of fresh karma into the soul can be stopped which is very important step for the attainment of liberation. But Samvara only stops the flow of fresh Karma. To accomplish the absolute liberation the influx of past karma which is already entered into the soul must also be destroyed. According to Nemichandra the destruction of actions is called Nirjarā.¹⁸ Thus that state is called nirjarā through which all the past actions are destroyed. In this state one becomes free from the already existing actions. It is said in the Tattvārthasutra that nirjarā can be attained by penance. Umāsvāmī advocates twelve kinds of penances. These are divided into two divisions, internal and external. The six external penances are fasting, avoidance of full meals, special restrictions for begging food, renunciation of stimulating and palatable dishes, lonely habitation and mortification of the body.¹⁹ And the six internal penances are reparation, modesty, service, study, renunciation and meditation.²⁰ These penances purify the soul by burning the undesirable elements which act as hindrances in the path of the attainment of liberation. Through these penances all past actions which are already mingled with the soul are annihilated. When all kinds of actions are annihilated the soul is separated forever from all karma and remains in its own nature. This state is called liberation. In this state the soul transcends the states of worldly pleasures and pains and stands in its own true nature of infinite bliss, infinite knowledge, infinite faith and infinite power. In this state the soul is completely separated from all actions.

To achieve liberation, one must have right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. In Jainism it is clearly stated that ignorance is the root cause of bondage. This ignorance can be removed by right knowledge. So right knowledge is the cause of liberation. Chandradhar Sharma says that right knowledge is produced by right perception in the teaching of the Tīrthaṅkaras. And right conduct perfects this knowledge. Hence right perception, right conduct and right knowledge collectively form the path to attain liberation.²¹ In the very first sutra of Tattvārthasutra, Umāsvāmī also says that right view or perception, right knowledge and right conduct together constitute the path of liberation.²² Liberation can be attained neither only by right view, nor only right conduct, nor again by right knowledge. Liberation is the joint product of all these three. In Jainism these three are known as the three gems (tri-ratna). Right view consists of faith in the seven essential principles or tattvas of Jainism.²³ These seven principles are Jīva, ajīva, āsrava, bandha, samvara, nirjarā, and mokṣa.²⁴ Right knowledge is the knowledge of the self and not self, free from doubt, illusion, and uncertainty.²⁵ Right conduct consists in the engagement of what is beneficial and avoidance of what is harmful actions.²⁶ A person can free from actions and attain liberation by following the path of these three gems of Jainism. Meditation is also important for liberation. Through meditation one can have right view, right knowledge and right conduct. And one can understand the soul by meditation only. Nemichandra also suggested us to practice meditation with careful mind, because a sage attains liberation by meditation.²⁷ Therefore meditation is most important for a person who seeks liberation.

Types of liberation in Jaina philosophy:

According to Dravya Samgraha liberation is of two kinds, Bhāva- mokṣa and Dravya- mokṣa. The modification of the soul which is the cause of the destruction of all Karmas is known as bhāva- mokṣa and the actual separation of the soul from all karma is called dravya-mokṣa.²⁸

When a person is desirous of having liberation he must have right perception, right conduct and right knowledge. Having right perception, right conduct and right knowledge, he becomes free from the four kinds of destructive actions (ghātiya Karmas) such as, the deluding, knowledge-covering, perception-covering and obstructive actions. The modification of the soul which leads to the destruction of these four kinds of destructive actions is called bhāva-mokṣa. And dravya-mokṣa consists in the separation of the soul from the non-destructive actions (aghātiya Karmas) such as, āyu, nāma, gotra, and vedanīya actions. Both these kinds of liberation together lead to absolute liberation.²⁹

Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude that liberation is the absolute destruction of all eight kinds of actions. The soul cannot attain liberation if all actions are not destroyed totally. To gain liberation all actions, ghātiya and aghātiya must be annihilated, because if these actions are left, these must bear fruit. When the soul is free from the eightfold Karmas through the processes of dissipation (nirjarā) with the help of right perception, right knowledge and right conduct, the soul becomes omniscient (Kevalin) and attains the absolute liberation. After achieving perfect knowledge, the soul is totally separated from the all kinds of actions and then attains the absolute liberation. Jainism believes in Bhāva- mokṣa and Dravya- mokṣa.

¹ . Bandha hetvabhāvanirjābhyaṁ ktsnakarmavipramokṣo mokṣa, ibid, x.2, p.146

³ . Nemichandra's commentary on Dravyasamgraha,31, p.54

⁴ . Śubhah punyasyāśubhah pāpasya, Tattvārthasūtra,vi, 3, p.80

⁵ . Mithyādarśanāvirotipramadakaśāyayogā bandhahetavaḥ, Tattvārthasūtra, viii,1, p.113

⁶ . Cetanāpariāmena rāgadveśamayena ca |

 yena karmāṇībadhyante bhāvabandhah eva hi || Vardhmāna Purāṇa, xvi,43 ||

⁷ . Bhāvabandhanimittena saṁśleśo jivakarmaṇoh |

 yoaso catuh prakārotra dravyabandho budhaiḥ smṛtah || ibid, xvi,44 ||

⁸ . Samyagyoganigraho gupti, Tattvārthasūtra,, ix,4, p.127

⁹ . Sā trividhā kāya vāñmano nigrahabhedāt, Sarva-darśana-saṁgraha, 40, p.74,

¹⁰ . Īryā-bhāṣaiṣaṇādānanikṣepotsargāḥ, Tattvārthasūtra, ix,5, p.127

¹¹ . Lokātivāhite mārge cumbite bhāsvadarāṁśubhiḥ |

 Janturakṣārthaā lokya gatīryā-matā satam || Yogasāstra 36 ||, translated into english by Olle

Quarnstrom, Harvard Oriental Series, USA, 2002.

¹² . Nemichandra's commentary on Dravyasamgraha,35, p.59

¹³ . ibid, 35, p.59

¹⁴ . Uttamakṣamā-mārdavārjavaśauca-satya-samyamatapastyāgākiñcanya-brahmacaryāṇī dharmāḥ,

 Tattvārthasūtra, ix,6, p.127

¹⁵ . Anityāśaraṇasāraikatvānyatvāśucyāsrava-samvara-nirjarā-loka-bodhidurlabhaḥ

dharamsvākhyātātvānucintanamanuprekṣāḥ,ibid, ix,7,p.128

¹⁶ . Nemichandra's commentary on Dravyasamgraha,35, p.60-61

¹⁷. Sāmāyikachhedopasthāpanā-parihāraviśuddhi-sukṣmasāmparāya-yathākhyātāmiti cāritram,
Tattvārthasūtra, ix,18, p.133

¹⁸ . Nemichandra's commentary on Dravyasamgraha,36, p.63

¹⁹..Anaśnāvamaudarya-vṛttiparisamkhyāna-rasatyāga-viviktaśayyāsana-kāyakleśā bāhyam tapaḥ,
Tattvārthasūtra, ix,19, p.133

²⁰. Prāyaścitta-vinay-vaiyāvṛtta-svādhyāya-vyutsarga-dhyānānyuttaram, ibid, ix,20, p.134

²¹ . Sarma, C.D., A critical survey of Indian philosophy, Motilal Banarsiādass Publishers Private Limited, 2009, p.65- 66.

²² . Samyagdarśana-jñāna-cāritrāṇi mokṣamārgaḥ, Tattvārthasūtra,, i,1, p.2

²³ . Tattvārthaśradhānam samyagdarśanam,ibid, , i,2, p.2

²⁴ . Jiva-ajivāsrava-bandha-sambara-nirjarā-mokṣāstattvam, ibid, i,4, p.3

²⁵. Sa saya-vimoha-vibbhama-viyajjiam appaparasaruvassa |
Gahaṇam sammaṇ-ṇāṇam sāyāramaneyabheyam ca || Dravyasamgraha,42 ||

²⁶. Asuhādo viṇivittī suhe pavittī ya jāṇa cārittam |
Vadasamidiguttiruvan vavahāraṇyā du jñabhanīyam | | ibid,45 ||

²⁷. Duvihāpi mokkhaheu jhāṇo pāuṇadi jaṁ muṇī ṇiyamā |
Taṁhā pyattacittā juyam jhāṇam samavbhasaha | | ibid,47 ||

²⁸ . Nemichandra's commentary on Dravyasamgraha, 37, p.64 36

²⁹ . ibid,37, p.64-65